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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED BEFORE

THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY

OF

LINCOLN'S INN,

On WEDNESDAY, FEB. 25, 1795;

Being the Day appointed by His Majesty's Proclamation for

A GENERAL FAST.

BY WILLIAM JACKSON, B. D.
STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
AND PREACHER TO THE SOCIETY.

OXFORD:

SOLD BY J. FLETCHER AND W. HANWELL;
AND BY P. ELMSLY, AND F. AND C. RIVINGTON, LONDON.

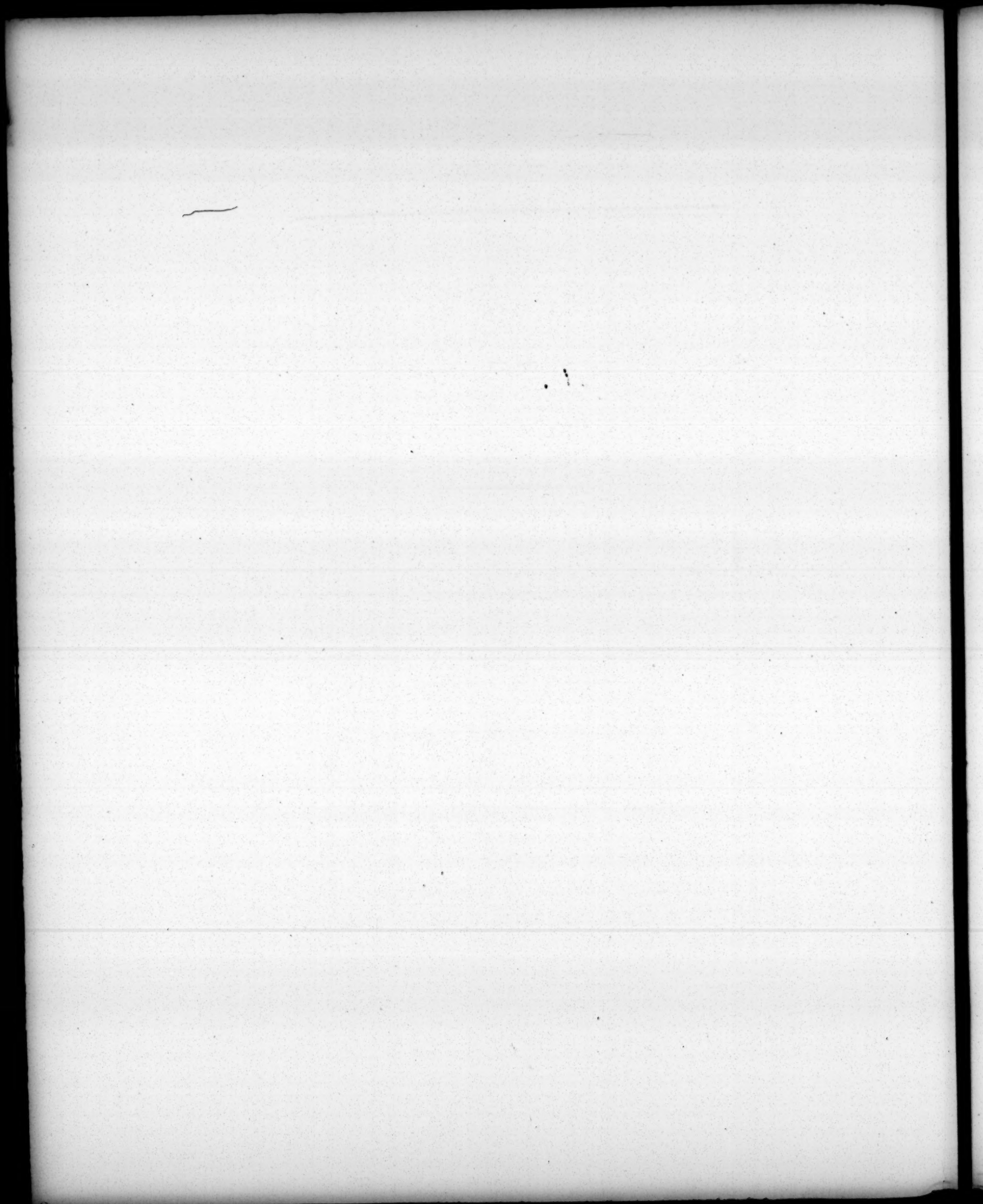
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JOHAN. WILLS,
VICE-CAN. OXON.

WADH. COLL.
Mar. 30, 1795.

TO
THE MASTERS OF THE BENCH
OF THE
HON^{BLE} SOCIETY OF LINCOLN'S INN,
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS WITH ALL RESPECT INSCRIBED
BY
THEIR MOST OBLIGED
AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,
W. JACKSON.



EZEK. xxxviii. 23.

*Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself,
and I will be known in the eyes of many nations,
and they shall know that I am the Lord.*

IT is not material, that we should state the particular occasion upon which the Almighty spake thus by the mouth of his holy Prophet, or that we should enumerate the more immediate dispensations of his Providence, the prediction of which is closed by these awful words. It is enough to observe, that the declaration contained in them is similar to many others in Scripture, where He who ruleth over all things vouchsafes to inform mankind of the end, to which the whole Oeconomy of his Government is directed—and that, under this view of it, it is the instruction of God, leading at once to considerations, the most fit to engage our minds upon the present occasion.

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It is sufficient then that we so refer to the declaration of the text, understanding from it simply—that the portion of good or evil, which is experienced by man under the dispensations of God's Providence, is so ordained by him, and so determined both as to it's nature and it's degree, as that it may redound to the manifestation of his glory—in other words, that these dispensations are so ordered, and so adjusted, as that they may produce upon the whole the evidence of the infinite power, the infinite goodness and wisdom, which directs them.

There is in fact therefore no other appreciation to be made, no other account to be taken of the events of this life, which can furnish to the mind any just and right idea concerning them. For there is no other principle upon which the appreciation can be made, or the account taken, which will not every way be subject to fallacy, and misconception, and error.

In the case of the individual then, whether he considers his own fortunes, or those of others, it may be asserted, that if he thinks at all, he will not be able to frame any other scheme, or to reason upon any other notion,
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under which his conclusions with respect to worldly events will be either satisfactory to his own mind, or at all consistent and agreeing with themselves — Applying himself to the instruction delivered by the Almighty, he will be furnished with the rule of judgment profitable to him for consolation, for edification, and righteousness.

After the same manner also, when our attention is turned to the judgments of God, which the nations upon earth are made to experience, and in which we ourselves likewise as a community are implicated, it is alike the conduct of wisdom and of piety, that we regard unremittingly, not the suggestions of our own fancy, not the imaginations of our own minds with respect to them, but the one great end, the one unerring purpose, which the Almighty hath declared to be his purpose in the accomplishment of them. *Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord.*

WE are assembled then on this day, as confessing that *the judgments of God are abroad in the earth* — we are come together under the

fearful sense of them, that with the rest of the people of this land we may join in the devout act of national humiliation before God, imploring forgiveness of our sins, and praying unto him, that he would be our aid and mighty protection, against the power of our adversaries.

I seek not to make the enumeration of misfortunes, or to dwell upon the lamentable events of war, the recent experience of which has brought along with it, alas! no firm security to the public safety; and the calamity of which hath made sorrowful perhaps, from the feelings of social or domestic relation, the inmost heart even of many of those who now hear me. But be it so—that the storm hath gathered around us with a violence little foreseen perhaps in the beginnings of it, and that the torrent hath born down, for the present, even our repeated and best endeavours to resist it—There are topics of consolation nevertheless, which even human observation (that which is called right reflection and sober mindedness) has still to hold forth—that new and unforeseen circumstances will often produce disaster, even where least expected — that the concurrence of measures, or of exertions requisite to secure advantage is often prevented, or the order of them
disturbed

disturbed by some event otherwise, and in itself indeed trivial—and that even out of calamity and disappointment such experience at least arises, as may lead in future to better caution, and better diligence. So may the speculations even of human policy be applied in the case of misfortune to extenuate the evil, to hold out the encouragement, and the hope. Still however this is the language of human counsel only. It may be useful to prevent despondency, and it may have the effect of stimulating in future also to more profitable endeavours: but it is at the same time in no degree the voice of religious sentiment; nor does such a language reach at all to the consideration of the over ruling Providence of God, or to the one great end to which the Oeconomy of that Providence is directed.

AMIDST the offices of devotion at least let us turn our minds to these more holy contemplations—and amidst the awful events, which call aloud upon us to join with fervency in the national humiliation of this day, let us deduce, not from the imaginations of our own hearts, but from the word of God, the fit estimates which humility and piety will lead us to make concerning them.

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The more recent events then of that contest into which this nation has been forced for it's own security, and it's own protection, have been those in which the enemy has found the cause of triumph. From success he has argued proudly also, that the cause in which he is engaged must itself be virtuous; that as such it must assuredly prevail against all opposition which can be given to it. But if the beginnings and course of the evil spreading now it's desolation so widely, are still however not to be forgotten, they with whom we contend, gave birth to the foul mischief by guiltiness altogether their own, and by iniquity almost unexampled. What was conceived in extreme licentiousness and profligacy of mind, broke out soon indeed, as in natural course it might be expected to do, into oppression and tyranny: for the nature of things is not changed, how craftily soever new names, and new appellations, be used for the disguise of them. They who had cast off from themselves all piety, and all due sense of Religion, soon became in the same unbridled spirit of evil passion, the open and wanton aggressors of the nations around them. With the anarchy and confusion which had dissolved all the bonds of civil society amongst themselves, and with the unheard of ferocity of oppression, which
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left no place for the charities of life, or even for the secure interchange of the ordinary offices of humanity; the frantic malignity also against other communities rose to its utmost height. No country, where the order of civil polity, or the blessings of a well regulated government prevailed, was left unattacked by arms, or uninjured by menaces. And the chastisement threatened to this land, was nothing less, than that we should be made like unto them who had amongst themselves no civil polity competent to the right ends of government—no administration of justice to protect the injured—no habits of mutual faith and confidence to invigorate industry, or to sustain the common intercourse of life. Nay the evil meditated had in the circumstances of it, what was more dreadful even, and more intolerable—that the people of this nation should be brought to consent with, or if not, should be vanquished by them who had no trust in a Redeemer, through whose name and merits intercession might be made at the throne of grace—who served not even a God with worship and holy reverence, before whose altar *the vow might be performed* in the day of trouble.

We mean not in this statement either general
 invective,

invective, or intemperate obloquy. But there are occasions nevertheless, where it may be the duty both of reasonableness and truth to represent circumstances in their true colours. The evil threatened to this country was surely then, in the early menaces of it at least, such as has been now described. It ought to be remembered also, of what extent the evil was, and against what designs, and what menaces, the sword of this land was justly and wisely uplifted in it's full force.

It hath pleased the Almighty nevertheless, that of the dreadful conflict there is as yet no cessation; and it hath pleased him also, that at length both against ourselves and against the nations confederated with us, the enemy vaunteth himself but the more furiously, from the successes which he has obtained.

Let it be remembered however, that the end is not yet — and that there is another also, whose throne is from everlasting, * *who setteth himself above the heavens, and his glory above all the earth. — I will magnify myself, and sanctify myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, that I am the Lord.*

* Pf. lvii. 12.

May not the hope be entertained then, not indeed with the presumption of arrogance, not with the confidence of any thing like a full discernment of the counsels of Providence — but still may not the hope be indulged at least, that the very successes of the adversary, against whom we have gone forth in battle, may be ultimately not the successes, through which he may accomplish the design of his heart, and cause the nations round about to fall down before the idol which he hath set up — May it not be amongst the hidden purposes of God, that longer and more terrible experience than human expectation would have looked to, of the miseries attached to the violation of order and regular government, joined to the contempt likewise of all which is just and holy — may it not be, that the evils consequent upon such criminality are permitted for a longer season, that when they shall be removed, the Sons of Men may stand afterwards in the greater fear of falling again into the same wickedness. ^b *The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient ; he sitteth between the Cherubims, be the earth never so unquiet.* And may not those who for the work of that wild con-

^b Pf. xcix. 1.

fusion, which *destroyeth* even as *the pestilence*, have taken counsel but of their own hearts — may not they be suffered for a while to prosper, that they may hereafter know and feel the more unquestionably, that *they have imagined but a vain thing*. The deep counsels of the Lord who may find out — ‘ *For my name’s sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off; for mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it.*

At the same time, if reflections such as these be indulged by us, let us beware of making them subservient to our own arrogance, instead of entertaining them with holy fear and true piety. To cherish the humble and devout hope, under a conviction that the issues of all things are in the hands of God, instead of appreciating the ultimate termination of events, from the apparent circumstance of those passing before us — this is to acknowledge the Providence of God, and to revere the greatness of his power. But to do more than this, to assume that the ways of God are manifest unto us, and that the present dispensation shall in

• Isai. xlviii. 9, 11.

the end of it so terminate, as we may ourselves rather wish, or conceive that it ought to do—that be far from us. The acts of the Providence of God, which fall under human notice, and strike human apprehension—^d *these are indeed parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him?*

Dismissing however these observations, I hasten rather to lead your attention to other considerations—to those with which at the same time we have a nearer concern, whilst they are at once to be deduced likewise from the reflection upon those events, under the sense of which we are this day assembled. I seek as before also to reason entirely upon those events, as at this time it is alone fitting to do, under the impression of religious principle—under a due apprehension of the power of God, and the justice of God. *I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord.*

Whatsoever then in those varieties of evil, which now for so long a time have vexed so large a part of the Christian world, whatsoever

^d Job xxvi. 14.

may be the final purpose of God's providence in them with respect to others, to the people of this land they have surely been the events of rebuke and calamity.

The bitterness of death hath been in them, destroying our armies by the disease of unwholesome climates, or bringing them down to the grave, amidst the unintermitted combats of war with a powerful and haughty enemy. The disturbance also of all our internal peace and happiness hath been in them—whilst the hearts of men have been disquieted, and fear and anxiety have taken hold upon them—the fear even, with all that belongs to it of evil foreboding and perplexity, lest the best and goodliest blessings which we enjoy, the blessings of liberty and well ordered government—lest these even should be made to cease out of the land in which we dwell.

In the instruction however, which we are to derive to ourselves, and for the regulation of our own conduct from the experience of national sufferings, as sufferings inflicted by the hand of God, there can be no ambiguity—none at least, unless we refuse to be taught of God, and *give no credence to his word*. I need not in so plain a matter

matter to enumerate the various declarations of Scripture, that he who sitteth in the heavens ^e *is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*—that ^f *he is jealous for his holy name*, and that *his anger is against those who turn aside from the law of his commandments*. The only question which we have to ask, is that which in this case indeed must be the question asked of our own hearts; there to enquire what vicious appetites are suffered still to prevail within us, what love of iniquity still leads us *to walk ungodlily in this present world*, and to provoke most justly God's wrath and indignation against us.

It may be, that we have cried unto God, when affliction came upon us, and that we have confessed our sins before him, when the violence of the enemy made us afraid. It may be—and blessed be the Almighty, that there are signs amongst us which in some degree may justify such an hope—that we are turned again also to a better sense of religious duty, and to a more holy sobriety, than at a period not very distant from these times, was to be discerned in the national manners of this country. It must be in the remembrance of all at least, when in the general corruption of them, we seemed to

^e Habak. i. 13.

^f Ezek. xxxix. 25.

have lost more than ordinarily all just sense of duty. When in security, then forgot we the Lord who made us, and very lamentably might it be observed to what alarming height the love of pleasure, the habits of luxury gratified easily through great opulence, and the relaxation of all discipline of mind had reached throughout all ranks of men. Every one walked in his own vanity, and the whole land was enfeebled through the contempt too generally entertained of all those principles which are the only sure foundations either of public virtue, or public happiness. Nay even the worst and most malignant symptoms of national degeneracy were abroad amongst us, when the very authority and purity of the Gospel of Christ were treated by too many but with open contempt; when men's minds were full fraught with the mad spirit of scepticism, and ready to favour every thing which held forth the scoff or the contumely against that faith and that hope, which the *Son of God* gave unto men, through the shedding even of his own blood for their trespasses.

Into such peril, it is not perhaps too much to say that we were falling rapidly, that we were plunging ourselves into the evil with an infatuation

tion too general, and with a confidence, which began to condemn all restraint.

If a better mind hath prevailed amongst us, and if in any degree we are now as those who ** walk circumspectly, redeeming the time*, let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

But let us also, under the pressure of those calamities, which the will of God hath inflicted upon us, let us give heed that we abound more and more unto holiness, and unto every good work. Let us be diligent especially to mix with our whole conduct, the particular carefulness and the peculiar cautions, which our very condition, such as it has now been described, makes it but the more entirely important, that we should not neglect.

The solemn ordinance of this day is surely a loud demand upon all ranks and degrees of men for the advancement of national reformation amongst us. But beyond this—in the reflection upon our own situation, such as it really is, there is still more which it may be profitable for us to attend to.

* Ephes. v. 15.

It cannot be the whole of what is sufficient in our case, (it is not so in the case even of the individual resolving to lead a new life,) that we implore the mercy of God in the time of calamity, that we put away from amongst us the more flagrant acts of iniquity, or that we seek to perform some acts of duty before neglected or remissly practised, with greater exertion and diligence. They who have been accustomed to weary themselves in unholy vanity, who have steered by no better guidance than the example of general or fashionable depravity, have a long course to measure back, a long and laborious work to accomplish, before they renew within themselves a right mind, and are made the servants of God again unto holiness. There is danger too, and the danger likewise of no trivial magnitude, in the progress towards amendment itself, which is made by those who are thus circumstanced. The long indulgence of vicious habits in any kind begets strange delusion in the estimate which men are apt to make of their own proficiency in the return to that which belongs to virtue. Between unbounded gratification, and the sobriety of self restraint, the contrast is in itself even so strong, that partial and casual submissions to the one, are mistaken often for sufficient evidences, that
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the other is abandoned throughout the whole extent of it. It is beyond controversy notwithstanding, that the partial and desultory act of rectitude is in no sense the completion of virtue—less, very much less is it any thing like the fulfilling of that holiness, which is required of them who walk in the light of the Gospel of Christ.

I urge as before the whole of these observations with the one direct reference to the awful doctrine of the text, already so repeatedly laid before you. Prosperity and adversity make the difference indeed of that outward circumstance, by which the condition of man is varied in this life. But in the dispensations of God's Providence, they serve uniformly and concurrently to advance the same end. They are alike the instruments, by which he worketh, that his name may be known upon earth, and his glory be made manifest in the sight of all men.

Whether or no therefore the love of virtue and the sense of religion be so restored amongst us as they ought to be, whether or no the repentance professed by us has had its perfect work, or whether our endeavours even after holiness have suffered nothing either from the

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arrogance

arrogance or from the security so likely to mix itself with them, it is for ourselves to answer without dissimulation. If we are not so ^h*purified from all double mindedness*, ⁱ*God is not mocked—whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap*. And in what nation or kingdom soever they who draw nigh unto him with their lips, are in their hearts notwithstanding far from him, from them also will he hide his face, when the day of calamity cometh upon them.

In what particular cases the fear of God is still neglected amongst us, or in what specific duties of holiness, of charity, or of temperance, we have yet much to labour, that we may be approved in the sight of him unto whom all hearts are open, the mind and conscience of every man will best inform him. *We judge no man—but there is one that judgeth, even the Lord from Heaven.*

CHERISH, we beseech you therefore even as the ambassadors of Christ, cherish the impressions which the considerations now insisted upon ought to make, and the feelings which they ought to excite. The topics which we

^h James iv. 8.

ⁱ Gal. vi. 7.

have used this day have been all of them selected studiously with the view of evincing to you, how fearful a thing it may be to delay the examination of ourselves, or to be feeble and torpid in the improvement which every individual may contribute towards national reformation.

There is also, as we have seen, the humble hope to be entertained—not indeed the confident presumption, but the humble and pious hope, that the apparent success of the adversary may in the end notwithstanding be far from enabling him to insult with impunity, either the security or the liberty of these realms. But the hope of God's mercy we take away even from ourselves, if we turn not every one from the iniquity which he hath committed, that our prayers may be sanctified, and that our cry may go up before the throne of heaven.

All at the same time which should inflame our hearts, which should give constancy and permanency to the holy endeavour, is at once before us. To be negligent in it is worse than folly, it is even madness, if the promise be, that it shall bring down the blessing of God upon
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our daily pursuits, ^k *upon all our encrease, and all the works of our hands.* It is this endeavour also, which if manly firmness and the love of our country have any praise, is the best act of citizenship which each amongst us can perform, and the best and fairest offering which the individual can make in support of the public welfare—But far even beyond this, and whatever may be the fate of kingdoms or communities, he who cleanseth his own heart shall *save his soul alive*, and the faithfulness in which he walketh *shall bring him peace at the last.*

^k Deut. xvi. 15.

